



By Larry Gierer
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Twenty minutes after he'd been named the winner of the Martin Luther King Jr. Unity Award on Monday, Russell County District Court Judge Michael Bellamy was still wiping tears from his eyes.

"Tears of joy," he said, clutching the trophy bearing his name. "This is a great honor that was totally unexpected. God is great. It makes me want to strive to do even more because to whom much is given, much is expected."

Bellamy is the 25th recipient of the award presented by the Delta Iota Lambda Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity at its annual Unity Award Breakfast.

About 1,100 people attended this year's event at the Columbus Convention & Trade Center. The theme was "Keeping the Dream Alive: A Beacon For the Next Generation."

Past winners of the prestigious award include Judge John D. Allen, U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop and former Columbus Mayor Bob Poydasheff, all of whom were present.

Bellamy oversees family court in Russell County, handling all cases involving juveniles. He said that for him it was special to receive the award on the same day Glenda Hatchett was the

featured speaker.

Best known for the television show “Judge Hatchett,” the Atlanta native was once the chief presiding judge of Fulton County, Georgia Juvenile Court. She is the spokesperson for Court Appointed Special Advocates, a nonprofit organization that trains volunteers to represent abused and neglected children and help them work through the court system. Much of her talk was about helping children.

“We must have permanency for our children,” said Bellamy. “We must make sure children get an education.”

In her speech, Hatchett said that children who drop out of school are 3½ times more likely to end up behind bars.

“We need to get the kids off the street and into school,” she said. “We’ve got to put a premium on education. We must support our schools. We can and must do better by our children.”

She said children need “someone to pray for them, someone to cheer them on.”

She spoke of getting children involved in activities. She wants children “running bases in softball and not running drugs.”

James Patrick, a longtime educator and president of the local Alpha Phi Alpha chapter, said he has known Bellamy since childhood.

“He has always been one to help other people,” said Patrick. “He wants children to be better off than their parents.”

“Judge Bellamy has always uplifted young people,” said State Rep. Calvin Smyre, the 2000 award winner. “He has always been fair and just. He has worked to make young men into productive citizens.”

Phenix City Mayor Sonny Coulter said Bellamy getting the award was a “well deserved honor.”

“He has done so much for our community,” said Coulter. “He’s a great guy.”